

Exploring the social interest in agritourism among the urban population of Kazakhstan

Abstract

The article examines the issues surrounding tourist activity and social interest in agritourism among residents of the main cities in Kazakhstan. Based on the survey results among a group of $n = 577$ respondents, the article inspected the extent of their participation in rural tourism, including agritourism, as well as their preferences and expectations regarding the type and extent of services offered on tourist farms. Research results show that the interest of city residents in using agritourism farm services is limited despite of a generally positive attitude towards rural tourism. Potential tourists' expectations of agritourism farm services focus primarily on the quality of accommodations and the sanitary conditions present in the facilities providing them. Domestic tourists especially expect to be able to take advantage of natural products with medicinal and cosmetic properties. They view active forms of leisure as a mere supplement. The respondents' opinions and assessments can determine the ways agritourism farms adapt to this clientele as well as impact organisational decisions and strategic planning of rural tourism in the country.

Keywords

Agritourism • tourist preferences • urban population • Kazakhstan

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Introduction

In international scholarly literature, the discussion surrounding the development and function of agritourism is extremely extensive (Kubal-Czerwińska 2018). Nevertheless, in Central Asian countries undergoing a systematic transformation, this issue is still brand new. The transition of post-Soviet countries from a centrally planned economy to a market economy brought with it profound structural changes in the economic sphere and significant social costs. The economy of the Central Asian countries is based mainly on fossil fuels and agriculture. The diversification of growth factors through the development of individual entrepreneurship represents one of the basic challenges facing this economy. Comparably to governments of countries of Central and Eastern Europe in the years between 1990 and 2000, those of Central Asian countries currently seek factors of economic activation of the population in the development of individual agriculture and the service sector, which is also related to tourism (Erdavletov 2015).

Kazakhstan, the largest country in Central Asia, illustrates the problems stemming from the political transformation in the region well. Kazakhstan is an agri-industrial country, the economy of which is largely dependent on revenues from the sale of crude oil. The 2014 crisis in the liquid fuels market led to a reduction in the real income of the state and the residents (eds Anderson et al. 2018). It forced the authorities to look for new drivers of socio-economic development. The current development strategies of the country, such as Strategiya 'Kazakhstan-2050' (2012), Gosudarstvennaya programma (2014), Gosudarstvennaya programma (2015), Gosudarstvennaya programma (2017), Strategicheskii plan (2018) and recommendations from international institutions, including the World Bank (2017),

point to agriculture as a potentially complementary factor of the country's economic growth. However, it is necessary not only to diversify agricultural production and increase its efficiency, but also to develop craft and service sectors in rural areas in order to limit the technological and their social degradation that continues since the 1990s.

Today, one of the priorities for rural development in Kazakhstan is to put forward rural areas of the country towards the development of tourist function. The development of tourist services on large farms is expected to increase the employment and income of farmers. Arguments in favour of the development of rural tourism are based on the experience of developed countries and those of Central and Eastern Europe, including Poland. Following suggestions from the World Trade Organization, governmental policies anticipate that tourism will become an instrument of economic development, which can improve the quality of life of the host communities, provide tourists with high-quality experiences and maintain the quality of the natural environment sought by both the host society and tourists (Erdavletov 2015).

The experience of European countries indicates that the development of rural tourism services, including agritourism, is based on the mutual and simultaneous stimulation of demand and supply factors. Social urbanisation progressing gradually since the turn of century creates the potential for the demand for rural tourism in Kazakhstan. In the past two decades, the growth rate of the urban population exceeded that of the rural population. In 2018, the percentage of the urban population reached 57% and, in comparison to 1990, it increased by approximately 7% (CSRK

2018). Considering the relatively high birth rate (21.77 per 1,000 inhabitants in 2018; CSRK 2018), the urban population currently determines the growth rate of the population of Kazakhstan.

The overall income of residents, especially in cities, is gradually increasing. The average monthly income of the population between 2000 and 2018 increased from 7,670 KZT (19.9 USD) to 83,053 KZT (216.2 USD) (CSRK 2018). The average income of Kazakh residents is still at a higher level than the inhabitants of other countries from the region, despite the effects of the economic slowdown in 2014-2015 and high inflation in 2016 at 14.5% (World Bank Kazakhstan 2018). Individual consumption is mostly growing in large cities, especially in the agglomerations of Almaty and Astana (since 2019: Nur-Sultan city), where the average earnings are higher than the national average earnings. Between 2013 and 2017, the level of consumer spending *per capita* per year increased from 417,555 KZT (1,086.9 USD) to 555,831 KZT (1,446.8 USD) (CSRK 2018).

The agricultural nature of this country is not the only favourable factor for the development of agritourism in Kazakhstan. Above all, the quantitative growth of individual family farms contributes to the rise of agritourism. As a result of the state's intervention policy, the number of family farms in Kazakhstan has been steadily increasing since the 1990s. In 2018, their number reached 194,828 (CSRK 2018), compared to 157,000 in 2006, with an average farm area of 248 ha (Pomfret 2013).

The exact number of agricultural farms in Kazakhstan providing accommodation and catering services for tourists is unknown. It can be estimated that the number of agritourism facilities throughout the country reached about 1200 to 1300 in 2019. The most dynamic development of agritourism is occurring in the region of Almaty (around 355 facilities) (Erdavletov, Aliyeva & Aktymbayeva 2017). The agritourism services sector develops comparably to that in other developing countries. Its development proceeds in a spontaneous and chaotic way without any standardisation of the scope and categorisation of the extent of these services.

The current state of research

The current scholarly discussion on the development of agritourism in Kazakhstan has focused on the recognition and assessment of potential geographical conditions – the environment and traditional rural culture – for the development of rural tourism (Wojciechowska & Uaisowa 2014; Shaken, Baiburiev & Plokhikh 2016; Erdavletov, Aliyeva & Aktymbayeva 2017; eds Erdavletov & Isakova 2017; Plokhikh 2017; Aktymbayeva et al. 2017; Shaken & Plokhikh 2018a; Plokhikh, Shaken & Mika 2019). This research also points to the expected economic and social functions of agritourism development from the perspective of the countryside (Erdavletov & Koshkimbaeva 2004a; Erdavletov & Koshkimbaeva 2004b; Erdavletov & Koshkimbaeva 2005; Temirbulatova 2012; Davletov & Tursumbayev 2013; Erdavletov et al. 2017; Ziyadin & Blembayeva 2018; Sartanov & Sartanova 2018; Tleubayeva 2019). So far, a few studies on issues related to the emergence of a rural tourism market have focused on the selected determinants of tourism consumption and considered the impact of infrastructural and social resources of rural area on the development of entrepreneurship (Kenebayeva & Syzdykbayeva 2013; Kenebayeva 2014).

Since the issues of tourism activation of rural areas and development of the tourist services market in the countryside are relatively new issues in Kazakhstan, a significant part of the literature is focused on the theoretical basis of the analysis of these processes as well as on defining the terminology. In previous studies, the meaning of "agritourism" was analogous or identical to the concept of "rural tourism" (Temirbulatova 2010; Erdavletov & Koshkimbaeva 2011; Shaken & Plokhikh 2018b). Similar

studies are conducted in the countries of the Eastern Europe, e.g., in Belarus or Ukraine (Pirozhnik 2015; Blazhevich 2017) and conflate these conceptual categories. Only recently have Kazakh scholars began to employ the term 'agritourism' to describe the provision of tourist services (accommodation and food) on a rural farms, which corresponds to the conceptual model of agritourism in Western and Central Europe (Kubal & Mika 2012).

The review of the current state of research exposes a lack of studies concerned with critically verifying the assumption that agritourism can be employed strategically as a factor of economic activation of rural areas in Kazakhstan. Moreover, few studies designate domestic agritourism development models adequate to the social realities and needs of the Central Asian Country. Agritourism, as an alternative to agriculture or a supplementary form of activity in the countryside, is still a relatively new concept in Kazakhstan. Therefore, the problem of the development of agritourism in this country remains unresolved. It is uncertain whether it is possible for the models of agritourism originating from the Western and Central Europe to develop the practice in Kazakhstan. Or perhaps, due to cultural, social or, more broadly, geographical determinants, other functional models of agritourism will prove more appropriate in this country.

The research question, aim and data collection

In the context of the issues discussed, a question arises: can the gradual increase in the affluence of the Kazakh society and the numerical growth of urban residents contribute to the development of the domestic demand for leisure in rural areas? The answer to this question is not only important for the correct formulation of strategic goals for local development, but is also crucial for building a support system – organisational, financial – for the development of agritourism services in the rural areas of this country.

Keeping the above-mentioned question in mind, an exploratory study in 2018 was carried out among a group of $n = 577$ inhabitants of the two main cities in the country – Almaty and Astana (since 2019: Nur-Sultan). The aim of the study was to determine the degree and extent, to which the agritourism package is or may be attractive to the inhabitants of Kazakhstan.

The study was conducted using a questionnaire form. The questionnaire contained a set of 71 detailed questions and included issues related to: respondents' tourism activity, the preferred forms of tourist trips, knowledge and interest in the leisure package offered in the countryside, including agritourism, as well as the maximum costs that respondents were willing to pay for a holiday in the countryside. The questionnaire was made available to respondents via an on-line form, which – as it turned out – affected the final sample structure. Due to its exploratory nature, this research was not intended to obtain results representative of the general population; such a solution impacted the conclusions. The collected results were compiled in the form of cross tables and the percentage distributions of answers.

Characteristics of survey respondents

The structure of the test sample included 64% women and 46% men (Table 1). The majority were young people aged 18 to 34 (69%). The participants were well-educated individuals (possessing a bachelor and higher – 91%) and employed (71%). Students represented twenty-six percent of the surveyed population. In terms of monthly income, the largest share (42%) in the test sample was people whose income exceeded 100,000 KZT per month (USD 260.3). For comparison, the average monthly wages in January 2019 amounted to 166,111 KZT in Kazakhstan (USD 432.9) (CSRK 2018).

Table 1. Characteristics of the test sample

| Gender | | Age | | Education level | | Employment | | Monthly income (in KZT) | |
|--------|------|-------|------|-----------------|------|-----------------------|------|---------------------------------|------|
| Female | 64 % | 18–24 | 38 % | Primary school | 9 % | Governmental employee | 29 % | 25,000 – 50,000 | 26 % |
| | | | | | | Housekeeping | 2 % | 50,000 – 75,000 | 4 % |
| | | 25–34 | 29 % | Bachelor | 52 % | Private sector | 31 % | 75,000 – 100,000 | 18 % |
| Male | 46 % | 35–44 | 19 % | | | Retired | 2 % | > 100,000 | 42 % |
| | | 45–54 | 10 % | | | Self-employment | 9 % | 100 KZT = 0.2603 USD (Jan 2019) | |
| | | 55+ | 3 % | Master | 39 % | Student | 26 % | | |
| | | | | | | Unemployed | 1 % | | |

Source: own study

Table 2. Respondents' preferences regarding holiday / vacation trips

| Category | Number of indications | % of respondents |
|---|-----------------------|------------------|
| Seaside tourism | 261 | 45 |
| Combination of different forms of tourism | 236 | 41 |
| Sightseeing | 98 | 17 |
| Weekend tourism | 84 | 15 |
| Sport tourism | 32 | 6 |
| Ecotourism | 26 | 5 |
| Agri- / rural tourism | 16 | 3 |
| City tourism | 5 | 1 |
| Mountain hiking | 4 | 1 |

Source: own study

Results

The collected responses indicated that the majority of respondents vacationed only once a year (64%). Only every third person, who participated in the survey, took a holiday twice or more times a year. Most often, recipients spent one month (47%) or two weeks (23%) on holiday. However, when it comes to travel, the vast majority of respondents travelled only once a year (83%). These were mostly domestic tourist trips (53%) or mixed trips – domestic and abroad (33%).

The tourist activity of respondents was typical of a holiday, including trips to the seaside (45%) and sightseeing (17%) (Table 2). As many as 41% of respondents described their tourist activity as a combination of different types of recreational activities. Quite a small group of the surveyed population organised weekend trips (15%). A minuscule number of people (3% of respondents) journey to the countryside during holidays.

The survey showed a generally low recognition of agritourism as a form of recreation activity among respondents in Kazakhstan. As many as 49% of respondents never heard about

this form of tourism, which is a meaningful finding, taking into account that a significant percentage of respondents possess a higher education. Among people who encountered the concept of agritourism, the majority only heard about this form of tourism (69%). Relatively few respondents expressed real interest in participating in agritourism – only 16% of respondents "would like to experience agritourism".

The lack of respondents' knowledge about agritourism is a factor influencing their assessment of the attractiveness of this form of tourism (Table 3). It is true that slightly more than a half of the respondents (52%) considered rural tourism an attractive way to spend their free time; however, almost 30% of respondents had a difficult time making an unambiguous assessment. For 19% of respondents, agritourism is not attractive at all.

Almost 60% of respondents agreed with the statement that they would be interested in spending a holiday in the countryside (Table 4). In this group, the majority (69%) declared that agritourism presented an attractive option for a trip. This group was not homogeneous in demographic terms, which indicates that the respondents' assessments and opinions are influenced by individual preferences. When analysing the distribution of respondents' answers aggregated in table 4, it should be underlined that these statements are declarative. The researchers exercised caution in assessing the social reception of the attractiveness of rural tourism because as many as 41% of respondents do not take into account recreation during a holiday in the countryside (Table 4).

The social perception of the value offered by agritourism was mainly connected with clean air as well as organic and natural food for the majority of respondents (72%) (Table 5). Significantly less people related this form of tourism to the experience of a closeness or unity with nature (27%), a peaceful life in the countryside (25%) or learning about the rural lifestyle (23%). At this point, one needs to determine whether these values can be considered the primary factors in the selection of agritourism as a form of tourism by potential clients or rather as meta-traits, which will create a context for the individual decision-making process, conditioned by other specific factors. The detailed list of values, from which tourists can potentially benefit while participating in agritourism, is presented in Table 6.

Further variables, aggregated in Table 6, one or a combination of which may prove the deciding factor for the social choice and future development of agritourism in Kazakhstan, emerge from the respondent's assessments. These include: housing and sanitary conditions in the countryside (58%), including the fact

Table 3. The social recognition and attractiveness of agritourism among respondents

| | | Do you find the agritourism attractive? [%] | | | | | |
|---|----------|---|-----------|------------------|------------|-----|----------|
| | | No | Rather no | It's hard to say | Rather yes | Yes | In total |
| Have you heard about agritourism in Kazakhstan? [%] | No | 5 | 6 | 21 | 11 | 6 | 49 |
| | Yes | 2 | 6 | 8 | 16 | 19 | 51 |
| | In total | 7 | 12 | 29 | 27 | 25 | 100 |

Source: own study

Table 4. An assessment of agritourism in the context of participation in rural tourism by respondents

| | | Would you like to spend your holiday / vacation in the countryside? [%] | | | | | |
|---|------------------|---|-----------|------------------|------------|-----|----------|
| | | No | Rather no | It's hard to say | Rather yes | Yes | In total |
| Do you find the agritourism attractive? [%] | No | 3 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 7 |
| | Rather no | 2 | 5 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 11 |
| | It's hard to say | 4 | 5 | 7 | 5 | 8 | 29 |
| | Rather yes | 2 | 2 | 4 | 11 | 8 | 27 |
| | Yes | 2 | 1 | 1 | 3 | 19 | 26 |
| | In total | 13 | 14 | 14 | 21 | 38 | 100 |

Source: own study

Table 5. The values of agritourism in the opinions and beliefs of the respondents

| Values | Number of indications | % of respondents |
|---|-----------------------|------------------|
| Clean air, quiet, environmentally friendly and natural food | 414 | 72 |
| Feeling of closeness and unity with nature | 156 | 27 |
| Peaceful rural life | 144 | 25 |
| New impressions and understanding of rural lifestyle | 134 | 23 |
| Comfortable living conditions of home | 68 | 12 |
| Other | 2 | 1 |

Source: own study

that 27% of respondents would expect to be accommodated in a separate room on an agritourism farm. The availability of a traditional sauna (rural bath, *monsha*) (29%) plays an important role as does a mobile communication infrastructure and internet (34%) which – as it turns out – not only evidences the need for information but also provides a subjective sense of security for tourists.

Tourists highly value an opportunity to consume organic products (51%), local dishes and agricultural goods offered by farmers (46%). The need to taste products with recognized health and therapeutic benefits is strongly emphasized in the statements (34%).

For some respondents, the perception of agritourism is also associated with active recreation. Among the opportunities for leisure activities in the countryside, respondents mentioned: trips (28%), hunting and fishing (15%) and sports. Definitely not many people recognise the values associated with participation in typically agricultural activities, such as the herding animals or gardening. Similarly, respondents expressed low interest towards learning local cultural traditions and crafts.

In economic terms, the social value of agritourism may be determined by the readiness of potential consumers to pay for its product (the services provided). Table 7 represents the percentage distribution of answers to the question: how much

Table 6. Preferences and expectations of respondents regarding agritourism farm services

| Category | Number of indications | % of respondents |
|--|-----------------------|------------------|
| Facilities | | |
| Bathroom and toilet in the house | 337 | 58 |
| Availability of mobile communication and the Internet | 196 | 34 |
| Rural bath, sauna, etc. | 167 | 29 |
| Accommodation in a separate rural house | 155 | 27 |
| Picnic area | 100 | 17 |
| Grocery store presence | 82 | 14 |
| Availability of bank card payment | 51 | 9 |
| Car parking zone | 19 | 3 |
| Special infrastructure for persons with disabilities | 16 | 3 |
| Catering | | |
| Consuming environmentally friendly products | 294 | 51 |
| Rural home-made food | 266 | 46 |
| Health improvement (<i>kymyz</i> , <i>shybat</i> , honey, etc.) | 194 | 34 |
| Familiarity with the peculiarities of national cuisine | 88 | 15 |
| Active recreation | | |
| Excursions | 162 | 28 |
| Hunting and fishing | 87 | 15 |
| Boating | 68 | 12 |
| Observation and participation in folk customs | 47 | 8 |
| Craft skills acquisition | 39 | 7 |
| Gardening | 36 | 6 |
| Sports | 36 | 6 |
| Care for livestock | 22 | 4 |
| Horse riding | 3 | 1 |
| Other | 3 | 1 |

Source: own study

Table 7. The respondents' willingness to pay for a one-night stay on an agritourism farm

| Value (in KZT) | Number of indications | % of respondents |
|-----------------|-----------------------|------------------|
| < 5,000 | 106 | 18 |
| 5,000 – 10,000 | 247 | 43 |
| 10,001 – 16,000 | 107 | 19 |
| 16,001 – 22,000 | 53 | 9 |
| > 22,000 | 64 | 11 |
| Total | 577 | 100 |

Source: own study

would you be willing to pay for a one-night stay on an agritourism farm? Most respondents (61%) would be willing to spend no more than 10,000 KZT per night (~ 26 USD). Although the approximate value of costs that respondents would be willing to pay for a stay at an agritourism farm ranges from 10,000 to 11,000 KZT per night (26–29 USD); it still seems to be a relatively high price in relation to the average monthly earnings of Kazakhstan residents.

Discussion

The presented survey results shed light on the social interest and demand for agritourism services among the residents of the main cities of Kazakhstan. One of the basic issues that emerge from this portrayal is the fact that despite the relatively high tourist activity declared by the respondents, a small group of respondents experienced and understood the essence of agritourism as a form of tourism. This finding can have a crucial impact on a further discussion about the role of agritourism services as a factor for socio-economic changes in the rural areas of Kazakhstan. Hence, the case of Kazakhstan describes the initial stage of development of a domestic agritourism market. Optimistically, the survey recognised the emergence of a group of people who consider rural areas to be attractive destinations for their own holiday, among the respondents.

The fact that tourism among residents of Kazakhstan is limited to one season per year represents a problem. Since social tourism activity is temporarily limited to one holiday season, the question arises: will a holiday in the countryside be attractive enough to be able to compete with a seaside recreation or the foreign trips? The infrequent tourist activity among Kazakh people during the weekend is also problematic. Weekend tourism is a well-established and important component of the tourist market in European countries. For example, in Poland, the model of commercial weekend tourism is an extremely important driving force for the demand of accommodations in small, family-run tourist enterprises in the countryside, including agritourism farms (Mika 2014).

The respondents' opinions clearly show in which direction the development of farms interested in tourism services should proceed. The basic issue, strongly emphasised in the research, is the expectation of a satisfactory level of rural accommodation services among potential tourists. The quality of accommodation services on farms as well as the state of technical and sanitary infrastructure in many cases deviates from the standards accepted by urban residents. An increasing number of Kazakh people raise their expectations of tourist services provided in the country by repeatedly participating in foreign tourist trips. The widening gap between social expectations and the level of services provided will undoubtedly constitute an increasingly serious barrier to the domestic demand for agritourism services.

It is worth empathising that almost every third respondent would expect an overnight stay in a separate bedroom on an agritourism farm. Breaking the psychological barriers to sharing a living space between guests and hosts is an extremely serious issue in the hospitality industry in the countryside. These barriers are found in both groups, the tourists and potential accommodation providers (farmers, hosts). The experience of Central European countries reveals that mental barriers and limitations as well as the lack of hospitality standards become insurmountable obstacles in the process of tourist activation of agricultural regions without tourist traditions.

The development of rural tourism services is also associated with offering traditional food and agricultural products of a recognised taste, health and cosmetic quality to the guests. It applies mainly to products based on traditional horse and camel milk (*kymyz* and *shybat*) as well as honey, herbs and meat products. Offering meals based on local agricultural products to

tourists is an inseparable component of an agritourism package in the regions of Europe, but in the case of Kazakhstan, this issue seems to have a special and distinctive meaning. Among the potential Kazakh tourists' expectations, a greater emphasis is put more on the health aspect of products than, for example, in Poland, where the expectations of guests tend to lean towards simply tasting the regional food (Kubal-Czerwińska 2018). Kazakh tourists expect to encounter traditional products with medicinal qualities that are derived directly from nature. The practice of using natural treatments is strong in the Kazakh society. It is deeply rooted in the tradition and national culture of not only Kazakhs, but also other Asian nations.

The third socially expected service on agritourism farms, which also seem to be culturally based, is a package focused on hunting and fishing, rather than sport. In this context, the little interest in horse riding among respondents is puzzling, although it can be assumed that horse riding in steppe conditions is treated as a part of hunting. The tourists' miniscule interest in participating in typical agricultural activities and contact with local folklore and its products is interesting. In European conditions, these are extremely important components of the agritourism product, which are offered to guests.

In the discussion of the social determinants of the demand for agritourism services in Kazakhstan, it is also necessary to take into account the influence of spatial distances, the role of which seems to be slightly different than in the European urbanised areas. Significant spatial distances, which must be overcome by domestic tourists in Kazakhstan, may have a major impact on tourism behaviour and consumer choices. The dispersion of settlements in the vast territory of the country and by the same token, agritourism farms, increases the cost and the time commitment required to provide services provided to urban residents. A closer analysis of the spatial location of agritourism farms indicates that some of the facilities are developing in the suburban zones of cities, e.g. Almaty. While these operate under the auspices of 'agritourism', they specialise in the production and sale of agricultural products to guests on the premises. One-day tourism is connected with this agritourism business model, which does not generate a demand for accommodation services.

The problem of the influence of spatial distance on the development of agritourism is much broader and also concerns other important issues, such as: the spread of innovation in service; knowledge (know-how) transfer; transaction costs in tourism activities; building a network of cooperation between suppliers; creating institutional support, consultancy and organisation networks of agritourism farms. The location and distance also significantly impact the attractiveness and accessibility of agritourism services for foreign tourists. This is an extremely important issue that requires separate research and a broader discussion.

Tourist activity is a function of the wealth of a society. In this context, the declarations of potential tourists about the amount they are willing to pay for agritourism services pose further questions. Considering the average value of earnings in Kazakhstan, which is close to that of the average wage in Central Europe, statistically, residents from Kazakh cities are willing to spend relatively slightly more for a holiday on agritourism farms than, for example, consumers in Poland. In the case of 'growing' tourist markets and transforming economies, the price of services is usually the basic and decisive regulator of consumer choice in tourism. Determining the reason that some inhabitants of the studied cities are willing to spend up to 20,000 KZT per night (~55 USD) for a stay on an agritourism farm requires further in-depth research on their decision-making process in order to recognise detailed categories that potential clients use to assess the value of agritourism services.

In the discussion about the tourist activation of the rural areas of Kazakhstan and the expected and strategic functions of agritourism, the fact that a significant part of its urban society has post-agrarian features cannot be overlooked. As a migrant population from rural areas to cities or descendants of the first migrants, urban dwellers still maintain close family and social relationships with inhabitants of countryside. Periodic visits to family and friends in the countryside constitute a component of their migration activity during the year (socially, this activity is not considered 'touristic'). In this context, one question arises: if and to what extent will urban residents be interested in using the advantages of the countryside on a commercial basis if they use the same assets in a non-commercial form anyway? Moreover, another question comes to mind: is there any social group among the urban society of Kazakhstan, for which the characteristics and values of the countryside are known so little, that they may become a source of motivation to visit tourist farms? And, also: if and when this group will be significant enough to create a permanent domestic demand for agritourism? At this stage of the research, however, it is difficult to answer the questions raised here.

Conclusions

The rich natural and cultural potential of the rural areas of Kazakhstan is not sufficient enough for the development of agritourism as a special category of rural tourism (agritourism, understood as providing tourist services on active farms). It is necessary to activate factors of tourist demand which, in light of the presented research, are currently undergoing gradual development. The Kazakh residents' interests in using agritourism farms in the country is limited, despite the declared general positive attitude towards rural tourism.

Expectations of potential Kazakh tourists regarding agritourism are focused primarily on the quality of accommodation services and a subjectively acceptable standard of accommodation as well as sanitary conditions in the facilities providing these services. Particularly, tourists' expectations focus on the possibility of using natural products with medicinal and cosmetic qualities as well as health benefits. Proposals for active forms of leisure time have a complementary significance


for domestic tourists. The opportunity to participate in agricultural activities or learn about the values of a culture is of concern to a relatively small group of urban residents.


In the light of the presented research, the foundation for the development of the Kazakh agritourism model may be drawn from its unique characteristic, a synergy of three service components: a) 'health' – created on the basis of natural and agricultural products with socially recognised medicinal and cosmetic values, b) 'ecological' – based on the aesthetic values and quality of the natural environment, and c) 'cultural' – using the values and diversity of traditional forms of hospitality of ethnic groups, who might adapt to the rules and principles of standardised tourist services

In the context of strategic plans for economic activation of rural areas, a coordinated promotion of agritourism, which would contribute to an increase in the amount of funds transferred through tourist migration to rural areas, conducted at the national level is necessary. These actions should, on the one hand, take into account the low recognition of this form of tourism in Kazakh society, and on the other hand, create a system supporting farms that are already engaged in tourist activities or are interested in incorporating these activities. It is necessary to intensify and broaden scholarly research on the determinants of the development of – broadly understood – rural tourism. At this point, it is also worthwhile to temper expectations of policymakers or scholars for agritourism as a factor for local development. The experiences of some rural European regions without tourist traditions, e.g. in the eastern part of Poland, indicate that tourism has not served as a remedy to structural social and economic problems of development (Bednarek-Szczepańska 2011; Kubal-Czerwińska 2018). This occurred despite the multi-year effort on the part of state institutions, local authorities and non-governmental organisations in the process of activating tourism in rural areas, including agritourism.

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